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REPORT ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS. INTERIM REPORT.

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THIS STUDY OF THE ILLINOIS STATE-WIDE CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS (ISCPET) WAS DESIGNED TO DETERMINE THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN GRADES 10, 11, AND 12 OF ILLINOIS SCHOOLS. IN THE SUMMER OF 1965, 500 QUESTIONNAIRES WERE SENT TO MEMBERS OF THE ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, SELECTED BY A STRATIFIED RANDOM SAMPLING PROCESS TO INSURE A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF TEACHERS FROM VARIOUS SIZES OF SCHOOLS. OF THIS NUMBER, 256 RETURNED FORMS APPROPRIATE FOR USE IN THE SURVEY. THE QUESTIONNAIRE CONTAINED 25 QUESTIONS CONCERNING (1) THE SIZE AND GROUPING OF CLASSES, (2) EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, (3) THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR, WRITING, AND LITERATURE, AND (4) PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION. THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY SEEM TO INDICATE THAT IN THE PREPARATION OF PROSPECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE COURSES IN GRAMMAR, THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AND WRITING GEARED TO HIGH SCHOOL TEACHING. FURTHER, THERE IS A NEED FOR A METHODS COURSE CONCERNED WITH TEACHING ENGLISH, AS OPPOSED TO THE GENERAL METHODS COURSES NOW OFFERED BY MOST COLLEGES. (THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE (LIMITED SUPPLY, FREE) FROM ISCPET, 1210 WEST CALIFORNIA, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA, ILL. 61801.) (AUTHOR)

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HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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ILLINOIS STATE-WIDE CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS (ISCPET)

Report on the Teaching of English in Illinois Public High Schools

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May 1968

The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and to a subcontract with the Illinois State-Wide Curriculum Study Center in the Preparation of Secondary School English Teachers, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois. Contractors and subcontractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the projects. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

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HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to determine the present status of the teaching of English in grades 10, 11, and 12 of Illinois schools.

In the summer of 1965, 500 questionnaires were sent to members of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. A stratified random sampling process was used in order to insure a representative sample of secondary school English teachers by school enrollment. The questionnaire contained 25 questions concerned with the size and grouping of classes; extra-curricular activities; the teaching of grammar, writing, and literature; and professional preparation.

Results and conclusions of this study are based on a return of 256 completed questionnaires. Teachers answering this questionnaire reported that heavy class loads and multiplicity of activities were the principal deterrents to effective teaching. The majority taught five classes of English daily, with classes averaging from 25 to 30 students. In addition, approximately half taught another subject also, usually speech or a foreign language. Many participated in extra-curricular activities, such as working with students on school publications and dramatic productions or serving as class or club sponsors.

Teachers answered questions concerning the teaching of grammar, composition, and literature, and noted areas in which their curricula were weak. In discussing grammar, more than half the respondents agreed that a new approach to the study of English might be more effective than the traditional one. Those who commented on teacher preparation in this area felt that too often the study of grammar, linguistics, and language history had been neglected in favor of literature. Similarly, teachers commented that they had been ill-prepared to teach composition, and suggested that more courses in composition and in teaching writing should be available to prospective English teachers. (When asked to evaluate their school curricula, the majority checked writing as the area most in need of greater emphasis, followed closely by vocabulary and spelling.) Nearly all who commented on their college training said that their preparation in literature had been adequate; not surprisingly, many considered literature their most successful teaching area.

Information concerning teacher preparation revealed that approximately half the group held M.A. degrees; all were college graduates. Not all were English majors, however. Slightly more than a third held degrees in other fields, ranging from administration and guidance to mathematics and music. Though most felt well-prepared to teach literature, many were weak in grammar, language history, and writing. They reported that often courses in these areas were either not available in their colleges or did not contain material applicable to high school classes. More than one person felt that too many college courses were geared to the "intellectual" student who was interested primarily in working for advanced degrees; thus, the students who plan to teach may have English <u>hours</u> to their credit, but may not have the background necessary for effective high school teaching.

The results of this study would seem to indicate that in the preparation of prospective secondary school English teachers there is a need for more courses in grammar, the English language, and writing geared to high school teaching. Further, there is a need for a methods course concerned with teaching English, as opposed to the general methods courses now offered by most colleges.

The results of this study are also reported in the October, 1966, Illinois English Bulletin.

II. METHOD

During the summer of 1965, questionnaires were sent to 500 teachers whose names appeared on the 1964-65 membership list of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. This list was considered especially suitable, since it contained home addresses arranged by towns. One person's name was picked from each small town; a number of names were chosen from the larger towns and cities. In these larger towns addresses were selected from various sections in hopes of reaching teachers who taught in different high schools.

The questionnaire contained 25 questions concerned with the size and grouping of classes; extra-curricular activities; the teaching of grammar, writing, and literature; and professional preparation. Teachers were asked to base their answers on their experiences during the 1964-65 school year. Although not all people answered all the questions, a considerable number not only answered them but also added comments and suggestions which should be helpful in pointing up areas in which teacher training might be improved.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section A: Returns

Of the 500 questionnaires 285 were returned. From these, 24 had to be disqualified because the teachers taught in junior high schools, parochial schools, or colleges; five could not be used because the respondents were no longer teaching English. The results of this project, therefore, are based on the remaining 256 replies.

Approximately 54 per cent of the men to whom the questionnaire had been sent replied, compared with 42 per cent of the women. Altogether those replying had taught English in 202 ninth grades, 218 tenth grades, 253 eleventh grades, and 303 twelfth grades during the past school year. One-third of the group had taught English from five to ten years, and 23 people had had more than twenty-five years of teaching experience.

Section B: Enrollment

The respondents to the questionnaire represented schools which, for

convenience in this report, will be referred to as Types I, II, III, and IV. Type I schools are those having an enrollment of under 500 students; Type II, 501-1,000; Type III, 1,001-1,500; and Type IV, over 1,500. As it turned out, there were almost exactly as many teachers responding from schools having over 1,000 students as from those having less than 1,000. For convenience, Table I below gives the distribution of the number of teachers in the sample representing school enrollments.

TABLE I: PERCENTAGES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS REPRESENTING ENROLLMENT OF ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS

Classification	Enrollment	Teachers Responding	Percentage
Type I	0-500	88	34.4
Type II	501-1,000	41	16.0
Type III	1,001-1,500	42	16.4
Type IV	Above 1,500	83	32.4
	No indication	2	.8
	TOTAL	256	100.0

Section C: Class Size and Work Load

Although this is not a study of large versus small schools, it has been interesting to observe the differences or similarities between them as far as the teaching of English is concerned. For instance, school size did not appear to have a significant bearing on class loads. Of the 129 teachers in schools classified as Types I and II, 49 (37%) reported teaching five English classes each day. Forty-four teachers (33%) of those in Types III and IV had similar schedules. Thirty-four per cent of the teachers from schools having less than 1,000 students had only four classes a day, as compared with 28% from the larger schools. (One person from a Type IV school commented that no one in his school was expected to teach more than four English classes a day.) The most marked difference between the large and small schools was that only one person from a Type IV school had as many as six classes daily, while five teachers from the under-1,000 group had this many.

Although the majority of people taught only English, 35 of the 256 teachers taught speech too. Seventy-one divided their time between English and other subjects ranging from language to sports. Almost half of these taught another language, usually Latin or French. Ten teachers said that they had classes in journalism in addition to their regular English classes, while eight served as school librarians part of the time. It is perhaps not surprising that all those who worked as librarians were from the smaller schools.

Class sizes averaged between 25 and 30 students, although 91 teachers had groups smaller than this. There appeared to be a definite relationship, however, between the size of school and class size: in Type I

schools, 39 out of the 88 teachers (or 44 per cent) had classes averaging less than 25 students; in Type IV schools, only 18 out of 83 teachers (21 per cent) had classes of this size. Between schools of Types II and III there was no difference in class size.

Only one teacher, from a Type IV school, wrote that his classes did not follow a daily schedule. He stated that he taught grades 9-12 and that he had both a large group of over 100 students and a small seminar group of less than 20 with "teaching on an individual basis." He did not specify which grades made up these groups, nor whether he had more than one group of each size. Two other teachers, one from a Type I school and the other from a Type IV school, reported having participated in a team-teaching program in which their schedules had varied during the year.

Most people classified their classes as "average" with "fast" classes running a close second. Ninety-two said they had "slow" groups. Only one person taught physically handicapped pupils, and although she did not say in what way they were handicapped, she said they were in a "slow" group.

Several teachers taught remedial reading as part of the English program and had classes devoted to reading. During the year one person taught 19 remedial classes, each lasting three weeks. From another school a teacher reported having conducted an experimental reading class for slow students. She did not specify the grade level of this class, but three others said they had remedial classes for ninth graders.

In addition to the remedial classes there were other specialized groups. Seven people taught honors classes for grades 10-12, and one also had a class for terminal students. Two teachers had classes based on special interests of students: one of these classes was made up of students interested in creative writing who were admitted to the class on the basis of writing samples and teacher recommendation; the other group was made up of students who had an elective in speech. In another school there was a special class for foreign students, and in a technical high school the classes were all male.

A teacher from a small town said that last year was the first time an attempt had been made in her school to group students according to ability. Another, from a school of the same size (Type I), said that each class was divided into two groups, with the college-bound and high ability students in one section--the "A" group--and all the rest in a "B" group.

Since extra-curricular activities are generally accepted as an inevitable part of a teacher's job, two questions concerned this aspect of teaching. Five activities in which English teachers might logically be expected to participate were listed. The one checked most often was dramatics, with 74 people having worked with students in play production. Next in order came work with the school newspaper, creative writing publications, and yearbooks. Debate was checked by only 15,

most of whom taught speech as well as English. Some teachers worked with students in several of these activities, some in none. Of the 121 teachers who did not check any of them, several explained that they had been a class or club sponsor instead. But most only noted that they had not participated in the suggested activities and did not elaborate further. When teachers did make comments about extra-curricular activities in their schools, they usually remarked that they were time-consuming and often cut down on time which might better have been spent in actual class preparation, student-teacher conferences, or paper grading. (No one mentioned that working together on out-of-class projects may be mutually beneficial to both students and teacher, in that it may promote a personal relationship which often is not possible in the more formal atmosphere of the classroom.)

Section D: Grammar and Teacher Education

The questions dealing with grammar and with teachers' training in this area revealed that 64 per cent of all those answering these questions had had no training in any but traditional grammar. Several of these, however, indicated that they had read and studied on their own and were hoping to learn more about the newer descriptions of the language from NDEA institutes and workshops.

In spite of the fact that only slightly more than one-third of the teachers had had courses in transformational grammar and/or linguistics, more than half the entire group felt that a new approach to the language helped--or might help--students to become better writers and speakers. A small minority (only 28 people) did not think that this would make an appreciable difference, while 24 per cent said they had no opinion.

Approximately 70 per cent of the 256 teachers reported that the curriculum in their schools was flexible enough to allow them to present non-graditional grammar if they chose to do so; only 19 per cent said this would not be allowed. The remaining 11 per cent did not know whether it would be permitted. One person commented that although she would be allowed to teach the newer grammars, such a practice would be "frowned upon."

A number of people discussed their experiences in this area of teaching. One person wrote,

> A linguistic approach with emphasis on sound...as well as sight seemed to help my students approach a concept of what language is all about. Not only did the tone of their writing improve but their grammar as well.

Another said,

> A new approach can be highly effective if it is intelligently handled and competently carried out. To use a new approach as a discussion tool and little else usually serves to confuse high school students.

And,

> Structural grammar seems to help them to understand the formation of sentences. They can more readily see the reason for the need of a particular part of speech.

Speaking for those who did not favor the non-traditional grammars, a teacher wrote,

> Structural linguistics (with its emphasis on spoken discourse) is of no value in teaching composition which has its own conventions. Transformational grammar is of intellectual interest only.

A teacher with nearly 20 years' experience stated that in her opinion traditional grammar was the better approach for bright students but that the newer descriptions of language might help slow students. This contrasted with the observation of another veteran teacher, who wrote concerning non-traditional grammar,

> Not [for] the average student or the poor student. In desperation I tried a slow group but they did no better (or worse) than before. I think the fast group could benefit, but I have no proof.

Several people agreed with the teacher who noted,

> It depends on which "new approach." I have 140 students...and feel that no one "new approach" has proved better than well-motivated and well-corrected writing with well-explained traditional grammar.

And there were these comments:

> The new approaches to the language help only if they are correlated with traditional jargon, especially when only a few pioneer English teachers attempt the new techniques.
>
> It most definitely helps, but there is no consistency in methods used by different teachers, which results in confusion.
>
> A <u>new</u> approach won't help anyone. An approach that best approximates the growth and change in language is invaluable. I favor an approach based on clarity and effectiveness of communication and implemented by reading and imitating past and current writing of prominent authors.
>
> I would much prefer the eclectic approach but so far no textbook meets my standards; therefore, I do my best to present the best of both systems.

The chairman of the English department in a Type IV school mentioned that school board and adult education is often necessary before new

innovations are introduced. He continued, "Some excellent books on grammar are out, yet are not being accepted... The public, since they directly or indirectly pressure for traditional grammar, must be educated to some of the new and excellent concepts prepared today."

Several people suggested that for maximum effectiveness newer methods of language study should be introduced at the junior high level or even earlier. But whether teachers favored the traditional or the non-traditional grammar, many emphasized the need to establish a pre-high school program which would <u>effectively</u> teach a progression of grammar aspects and thus, perhaps, eliminate the yearly repetition of material. Such a program might make possible the state-wide standardization of language requirements, and it was suggested that students should have to acquire certain minimum language skills before being allowed to enter 9th grade.

As might be expected, teachers did not all agree on the importance of formal grammar study. On the one hand, some felt that if more time were put on reading and writing in the elementary and junior high schools, less emphasis on grammar would be necessary. One person suggested that "there should be emphasis on grammar and linguistics in grades 9 and 10. Grade 12 should be devoted to writing, literature, and a great deal of free and directed reading." A teacher from a Type IV school said that she was working on a syllabus for next year's grammar work which would be built entirely upon writing. This program will use selections from well-known authors stressing particular parts of speech used to achieve effect, and students will work on similar paragraphs. More than one teacher reported not teaching grammar except as the need for it arose in pupils' writing. On the other hand, there were teachers who believed that grammar study <u>per se</u> is an important part of young people's general education. Some suggested that the study of English might be approached in the same way as the study of a foreign language, perhaps using the conventional patterns method and language laboratories.

Several said that their schools were hoping to broaden their language programs. One teacher from a Type IV school explained his school's curriculum: "We are this fall moving into a language program that includes transformational grammar, lexicology, dialectology, and language history." Although generally teachers did not discuss which texts they used, several mentioned the Harcourt Brace series; only one person reported using Paul Roberts' text.

A few teachers emphasized that for successful teaching of grammar, as of any other subject, the method should be varied to fit the needs of the class, and perhaps more than one technique should be used. For instance, a ninth grade teacher with over 10 years' experience explained, "I usually try the formal grammar first. Second, come the patterns, but simplified. I cartoon for the still non-understanding."

Both those who favored traditional grammar and those who leaned toward the newer descriptions of the language admitted that most students had

a marked aversion to "grammar." And a number of teachers expressed their discouragement in teaching this subject because so often there is little carry-over into students' speech and writing. They did suggest, however, that because of the difference--not the "same old grammar"--the non-traditional approaches might be helpful in combatting negative attitudes and capturing student interest, even if only temporarily. More than one teacher remarked that, unfortunately, the lack of suitable high school texts has limited the teaching of newer grammar concepts in most schools.

Among those answering the questionnaire were a number of people who held supervisory positions in their schools. Some were department heads; others worked with student and practice teachers. Those who commented on the subject of teacher preparation in grammar and language history were unanimous in stating that, generally, this is an area in which many new teachers are weak. The remarks included these:

> I have had a good many students from universities around the Chicago area through the years and a generalization I feel worthy of risk is that they are very poorly prepared in formal grammar, traditional or otherwise. They seem to know a lot about small areas of current literature but know less about their mother tongue than do our able high school juniors and seniors.
>
> I have interviewed more than 200 applicants for jobs this year. I find too much emphasis on literature and not enough on linguistics, advanced grammar, and the English language.

Several agreed with the department chairman who wrote:

> Inexperienced teachers usually are interested in teaching literature to the neglect of composition and grammar. Good literature teaching can come only with experience with life. How can we teach them that there are other facets to the English program just as important?

From the other side of the fence, the teachers complained:

> I was graduated in '63. At that time I was unable to take a course in advanced grammar because it was an education course. I did not have time to take the course because I was trying to fill in English requirements. I think this course should be required for all secondary English teachers. I went into teaching with only high school preparation in grammar and was expected to teach it effectively.
>
> I am working on my master's: all we do is study literature and criticize. Personally gratifying, useless in high school teaching. In three years of work...I have taken only <u>one</u> - the only one offered - course in linguistics. This course

is now closed to English majors. There is some question whether it can be counted toward the degree.

Teachers are not teaching grammar because they don't know it.

The linguistics I'm being introduced to is far from that which might be effectively implemented in the classroom.

Section E: Composition and Teacher Education

The questions concerning writing evoked considerable response. Statistically, only 13 per cent of the teachers said that they did not teach a unit devoted to writing some time during the year. Of those who did not teach such a unit, most indicated that their students did write regularly or had occasional special projects, such as term papers or reports. (This 13 per cent also included those who taught semester writing courses.)

Although many schools follow a curriculum which is divided into units - with each unit designed to cover a specified period of time - one person felt that this was an unrealistic approach, especially in writing. She wrote:

> Giving an exact unit to every teacher...does not make sense. In remedial classes it may take seven months to write a clear paragraph; in average classes, five to seven weeks; and in fast classes, two to three weeks. It seems obvious that the same unit cannot be used for all types of integrated classes at the same time. In one class where all types of students are together, it is yet more important to allow for individual levels of achievement from the beginning of the freshman year.

According to this survey, the higher the grade level the more writing was expected of students. For example, 38 per cent of the twelfth grades had writing units as compared with 8 per cent of the ninth grades, and slightly more writing was done in the eleventh grades than in the tenth grades. (Approximately one-third of those who taught tenth and eleventh grades said that they taught a writing unit.) More than half the responding teachers, however, felt that writing was the area most in need of more emphasis in their schools' curriculum.

For most teachers the writing program was handicapped by two factors: lack of time for effective teaching and their own inadequate preparation for teaching composition. Many complained that, with five classes each day, the task of correcting themes was a monumental one, and thus they were unable to give as many writing assignments as they felt the students needed. Lay readers had been a great help to some. From a Type IV school a teacher wrote:

> We are able to do a good job in composition because we have lay readers, time to prepare assignments, and time to consider

(with the student) the problems in organization, paragraph development, etc.

Others had been disappointed in lay readers' help: "I have to grade the reader's comments as well as the composition."

Several teachers emphasized the importance of student-teacher conferences in evaluating student writing, and deplored the fact that extra-curricular activities often make them difficult to schedule. (Teachers reported that in some schools such activities may be scheduled during the school day as well as after school.) Since individual conferences are not always feasible, several teachers tried to "grade little but comment liberally," as one expressed it, and to appraise student work realistically. Sometimes teacher-class evaluation and discussion of both student and professional writing were implemented by use of an opaque projector in the classroom.

Many who commented on writing felt that integrating composition and literature was especially helpful in stimulating student interest. Writing assignments often stemmed from reading not only essays and poems but also plays and novels. But some teachers, though they thought this practice desirable, were not able to follow it. "In our school it is impossible to have writing integrated with literature because we have 'days' for literature and 'days' for composition with different students in each division."

Several people suggested that composition should not have to be combined with any other aspect of English, but should be taught as a separate class. One person thought that in addition to the regular English class there might be two regular class periods for writing. If this were done, these two extra days "might be divided into a 'heavy' day for writing and a 'light' day for corrections. All writing would be done in class."

Ninety-eight per cent of the teachers reported that their students did at least some of their writing in class. A teacher from a Type I school with a small class (under 25 students) explained,

> During the past year I have had students write in class almost daily, then check their own papers for errors. I do not indicate their mistakes, but insist they proofread their work until it is corrected acceptably.

Others commented that the usual 40 to 50 minute class period was inadequate for writing a composition of any length, and suggested that English classes might be scheduled as double periods, as are some technical and vocational classes.

A few teachers discussed their writing programs:

> My students write couplets, limericks, haikus, lyrics, and a few attempt longer poems.
>
> I stress the use of imagination and originality as much as possible...I try to correlate history, literature, music and

science in my theme subjects...My students sometimes go to the symphony with me and write the story the music tells, or they go to the theater with me and write of a definite character's feelings (in the first person). They write first person, highly imaginative accounts of astronauts and their preparation, trip, and findings in outer space. They enjoy this after the first few assignments, but most of them have trouble with such subjects as favorite smells, loneliness, being part of a crowd, and various types of fear. After they suffer through a few intangible subject discussions they loosen up and enjoy writing. Practically none of the themes are read in class, and no theme is ever read without the writer's willing consent.

I teach the writing of a term paper in all three grades (10, 11, 12). Each step is worked on partially in class and then independently. This cuts down on plagiarism. I have units on theme writing, paragraph writing, the writing of poetry, short story writing, and creative writing; I integrate this composition with literature as much or as often as the opportunity allows.

Unless each paper shows an advance over preceding papers, the writing program has failed. Having but two points to be marked each time leads to a more effective use of the writing lesson.

I have difficulty making the assignments clear to my students. I hope to make more use of "student models" this year.

> I am never sure I'm teaching English composition properly, but I have a "success" every now and then, due perhaps to my using any new thing that sounds promising, plus all the old things I haven't discarded.

It was suggested that "we need more composition, coupled with freedom of expression as a goal. Once freedom is attained, we need to guide them toward a disciplined style." A frequent criticism of student writing was that students have not been taught to think logically. A teacher summed up the feelings of several by saying, "Students have difficulty in delving into a subject and then writing about it coherently. Their writing lacks maturity because their thinking and reasoning are weak." Others cited the need for students to be helped toward clarity of expression and toward originality in their writing. Said one teacher,

> Who teaches composition? Composition implies some originality, which, alas, requires some inquiry and thought, heaven forbid! Let's at least call it by its right name - arranging.

Another often-repeated comment was that students have done little writing before they reach high school, and that even in high school many write little except in English classes. Consequently, "each student becomes an individual problem." It was suggested that students should be writing not only in junior high school but also in elementary grades, and that schools should begin at this level to "instill

confidence in the student's own ability to express an idea that is worthwhile."

In teaching composition many teachers were confronted with the frustrating facts that, with all the other things to teach, only limited time could be devoted to writing; that heavy class loads made conscientious evaluation and correction difficult; and that students were often poorly prepared--i.e., they may have done little reading. How were teachers prepared to cope with these problems? The answer, as given to this questionnaire, appears to be that they were not prepared. The recurrent theme of the majority of answers was that college training, both in writing and in teaching composition, was inadequate and/or not applicable to the high school situation.

The question was asked, "In your opinion should there be more emphasis on writing, and on teaching writing, in the college training of prospective teachers?" An overwhelming 98 per cent said "Yes" and many amplified their answers:

> I have over 50 hours of English credit and have not yet taken one course in rhetoric or the teaching of writing. Two courses in composition should be required of every English major.
>
> Emphasis should be placed on writing in the junior and senior years of college so that students will remember it when they go out to teach.
>
> The teaching of writing should include theme evaluation, marking standards, criteria, etc.
>
> This college...offers no courses in writing in the English Department. Freshman rhetoric is used as a means of dumping the "non-college caliber." I guess the student and teacher are somehow to magically acquire the skills in teaching reading and composition through the study of 17th century prose and 18th century poetry. In the schools I have seen, if a teacher of English does a good job of teaching reading and writing...he has learned to do so on his own.
>
> The only college course I had in writing...contained nothing I could apply to teaching high school students.
>
> Many college teachers assign themes, write a brief comment and expect the student to learn!
>
> I have six teachers teaching English. None of them has had any writing courses other than the required freshman course.

Only one person said that her college training had prepared her for teaching composition. She wrote,

> My training included rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and an hour a week of writing analysis which lasted 4 years - an English major requirement. This hour a week was most useful to me.

Two others reported that they had been professional writers at one time, and that this experience had been a great help to them in this phase of their teaching.

A much-repeated comment was that though teachers do their best in teaching composition, they do not have clear standards to guide them. As one person expressed it, "I feel I need an 'evaluation of my evaluation' of student composition. Am I demanding the quality and type of writing that will be needed after high school graduation?"

A number of people remarked that in order to teach composition effectively, one must have written. This experience may have come from college courses--"Every English course I have ever taken has involved many writing assignments. I feel that I learned more from these than from the one course in composition which I had"--or from writing done for personal satisfaction. Of the 253 people who answered the question, "Do you yourself write?" 14 per cent replied that they wrote regularly; 60 per cent that they wrote occasionally; and the remaining 26 per cent that they wrote only rarely. Unfortunately, most people did not elaborate their answers, probably because the question did not ask for more information. One person explained, however, that when she gave a writing assignment to her class, she often did the assignment too. Another said, "I always find myself writing reports and comments for the local paper and for the county institutes, etc." Others commented briefly, "Who has time for writing?"

Just as many teachers were judged ill-prepared in grammar, many are deficient in basic writing skills and in the reading background necessary for good writing, according to their colleagues. One person wrote, "Teachers often cannot write...cannot write sensibly, grammatically, and/or in an organized way." And another said, "English teachers ought to be avid readers. Most of ours are not. They have not read and are not reading."

Section F: Reading and Literature

The suggestion was made that there is a great need for more study of the relationship between teaching reading and teaching writing. A teacher with more than 10 years' experience had this to say:

> Relationships between the teaching of reading and the teaching of writing should be studied more carefully. The nature of the English language is, of course, an essential element. For example, assuming we could agree on specific qualities of writing that we wanted to study, we might be better able to teach these qualities both in reading and writing skills if we knew <u>exactly</u> how these qualities manifest themselves in language. I do not think most teachers are even aware of this problem now.

Several people urged that secondary teachers should have an understanding of the reading process since many students may need help with reading. Although some schools have remedial reading teachers, many do not. Thus,

> While English teachers need not be trained in the treatment of acute reading problems, they could and should know how to deal with reading problems in their own classrooms. Too often there has been <u>no</u> instruction in reading after grade 6.

Others disagreed. As one teacher said, "It is unrealistic to expect the English teacher to be prepared to teach reading. There is simply not time for this in an already overcrowded schedule." She recommended that all schools have a person trained to teach reading, no matter what the cost. If necessary, she suggested that some other area of the curriculum should be curtailed to make this instruction available.

Teachers stressed that many students are handicapped in their writing because their reading background is poor. For example:

> Our students who come to the eleventh grade classes know nothing about sentence structure or paragraph or theme writing...They not only cannot write a good sentence, they have not read--not Mother Goose, or fairy tales, or any of the classics.

For such students, especially those in the ninth and tenth grades, most teachers (approximately 80 per cent) favored the use of literature written for adolescents as part of the English program. Many agreed with the department chairman who wrote,

> [It is] useful especially for reluctant readers. I lean on it heavily in remedial courses and then use it to elevate reading taste...Teachers must avoid stigmatizing it as immature. After all, what really good readers read a diet of pure classics? All good readers read omnivorously and learn discrimination from the variety they read.

A number of people mentioned that this type of literature was helpful to students because they could readily identify with the characters and their problems, and through this identification might be helped in coping with similar problems in their own lives. They concurred with the teacher who remarked that "a mature handling of adolescent interests can keep the slow learner reading, whereas the classics will drown his weak interest once and for all. Others added that more well-written, serious, unpatronizing material is needed for those with poor reading ability, and cited as especially suitable the works of Rawlings, Annixter, and Stoltz.

A problem brought to light in some of the comments about adolescent literature was that often teachers were not familiar with good material in this field. Elementary teachers usually are required to take a course in children's literature, and it was suggested that a similar course for secondary teachers would be valuable.

Teachers did not, of course, suggest that the classics be abandoned. Some favored traditional material only, even for the slower classes. Those who utilized literature written especially for the 15 to 20 year olds usually stressed that it should be used as transitional material to bridge the gap between Nancy Drew and Hamlet.

Almost two-thirds of the responding teachers believed that a survey course is the best way to present important literature. During the 1964-65 school year approximately 40 per cent taught both English and American literature; 24 per cent taught only English literature; and 24 per cent taught only American literature. (The remaining 12 per cent said they had not taught literature.) Though only half a dozen reported having taught world literature, several others said that they felt this was an area which should be included in the high school curriculum.

From those who favored the survey approach came these representative comments:

> I believe it is effective for a required course because the type of material is so varied that many students find new areas of interest. I also enjoy the flexibility of a survey course. We use library collections and paperbacks to supplement the text.
>
> I still believe that the survey course is the best way to present all types of literature. I have my students do some reading-in-depth, but firmly believe that too much dissection, too much symbol watching, etc., can do more harm than good and cause the student to hate what he reads.
>
> A good survey...in high school allows for an over-all view so that the student is then ready in college to select the specific area or author with an understanding of his placement and importance in the entire scope of literature.
>
> It is far from the best but the only possible method in the small school with a limited staff. It can and should be supplemented.

Some of those who believed that the survey was not effective said:

> How can anyone meaningfully survey English lit.? The treatment of literature becomes superficial.
>
> If students go to college they will have survey courses there, and if they don't they will be unimpressed by a non-selective survey course. An intensive analysis of significant literature with a cursory reading of less important literature would be more valuable to all students. All students should understand the process of creativity in literature and they should learn to analyze literature by themselves. By intensively studying a few selected pieces of literature, they could better learn what literature is.

> Reading in high school should be pleasureable--I don't mean simply fun. Many selections in the typical survey course are beyond a 17 year old's realm of experience.
>
> A chronological survey may seem easy to teach, but how effective or meaningful is it for the student? After two years of teaching surveys I doubt the survey method's appeal to the student. Instead, while studying literature, certain writers and their techniques could well be used to illustrate possible methods that the students can use in their own writing. Literature and composition, when integrated, the former not necessarily studied chronologically, aid both reading and writing skills. I've used the "integration method" not to fit the writing needs of the class but in order that students might see the relationship between literature and writing.

Several teachers considered survey courses more appropriate to one grade level than to another. It was suggested that while a survey might be suitable for freshmen, above this level the genre approach might be more effective. Others said that they had successfully taught English literature as a survey but had concentrated on types of writing in American literature.

Three people reported that their school included literature as an important part of a humanities program. One person discussed his school's curriculum in some detail:

> We have developed a program which, though perhaps unorthodox, has been of great benefit to college-bound students. At its fullest extent, the program covers a three-year period. The first year is for sophomores and is known as American Arts; the second and third years, for juniors and seniors, are known as World Arts I and World Arts II. Together, in the complete program, they represent a fairly comprehensive examination of the major arts and cultures of the western world...Our arts classes examine the literature, art, and music of a period, concurrently and chronologically; thus, a strong sense of unity among the arts is created, with each art observed as a separate part of an all-pervasive artistic impulse rather than as a purely literary phenomenon or musical phenomenon. We reason that the student who has heard Romantic music, read Romantic poetry, drama, and novels, and studied Romantic paintings has a far more extensive understanding of the movement known as Romanticism than does the student who experiences only one of these. Also, when he studies Classical French drama of the 17th century, he is able to relate it directly to what he has already learned and experienced of the Classical Greek drama; both become more meaningful by the comparison which he is thus able to make....
>
> The real justification of the program is the degree to which it has prepared our students for their humanities requirements and experiences at college; none who has ever completed the program has suffered from "cultural shock" at the advanced levels.

Concerning the actual teaching of literature, more than one person complained that too often the study of literature in high school evolves into simply giving facts. Teachers emphasize--and student are expected to learn--insignificant details about a work without having a real understanding of what the author is saying. One person observed that "most teaching of literature and composition has the effect of driving most students straight to some other course or area." He added,

> When junior high teachers start teaching The Red Badge of Courage and when high school teachers start teaching Hamlet, Milton and other highly complex literature, we have lost our perspective. Kids do not have the experience in life to cope with these, 140 I.Q. notwithstanding.

Others bemoaned the lack of good texts for literature classes. One criticism was that much material in anthologies is "trite and shallow." Another urged,

> Take a look at all the high school textbooks.... It is really true that school texts are edited by senior female citizens who deem it more important to tell of Hawthorne "sitting in the bedroom staring out at the family graveyard" than to include even the least hint of what those "scary" stories are really about?

Section G: Teacher Evaluation

More than half the teachers, when asked to evaluate their teaching, considered the teaching of literature their most successful area. Of this group, those who felt they did an especially good job in teaching poetry outnumbered two to one the teachers who claimed success in teaching fiction and drama. Interestingly enough, in spite of the comments about inadequate preparation in grammar, this was an area which rated quite high. Although it was difficult to compile accurate figures on teacher evaluation of success in certain areas--since some declined to answer the question and others checked several items--the areas were ranked this way:

integrating composition and literature
instilling love of reading in students
teaching grammar
teaching fiction
teaching composition
teaching drama
teaching vocabulary and spelling.

Vocabulary and spelling was also checked as an area in need of greater emphasis in most schools, second only to writing. It was pointed out, however, that in speaking of emphasis it is not so much a matter of giving more time to the subject as of finding better ways of teaching it. Though teachers commented on the difficulty of teaching vocabulary and on the lack of carry-over into speech and writing, only one person discussed methods of presenting this subject. She reported that she used

Bergan Evans' language records, evidently with success.

Several people felt that in addition to writing, vocabulary, and grammar there were other areas which needed special stress. Reading was mentioned again as one subject which frequently is neglected in high schools, and it was suggested that students need to listen carefully. Several respondents commented that in English classes students should be encouraged to think for themselves and should be given opportunities to develop and express their own opinions.

Forty-three per cent of the teachers reported that they were expected to follow a curriculum guide. In some of the smaller schools there was no set curriculum plan, and teachers complained that this caused lack of unity within the department. In schools which had a curriculum guide, approximately three-fourths of the teachers felt that it had been very helpful, especially in the first years of teaching. Only 25 per cent said they considered a curriculum guide unimportant as a teaching aid.

Section H: Teacher Education

All the teachers responding to this survey had at least a B.A. or B.S. degree and more than half had done some graduate work; 122 people had earned a master's degree. Of this number, six had completed additional hours toward the Ph.D. Two people held an M.A.T. degree, and one held an Ed.D. degree. Approximately two-thirds of the entire group reported that their degree was in English. Of those who indicated other subjects, 30 said they had been education majors but did not specify their teaching field. Others held degrees in subjects ranging from art and music to zoology and mathematics.

Among those holding masters' degrees the largest number of non-English degrees were in the fields of guidance, administration, and education. More than one person remarked that in some colleges the graduate courses in the English departments were so poor that they chose to work for a degree in education and to take additional English hours as it was possible to do so.

The fact that 38 per cent of the responding teachers did not hold degrees in English was interesting in the light of comments made by several teachers who complained that too many are not English majors. Several emphasized that the English teacher's job is one of the most demanding of the entire high school faculty, and to assume that "anyone can teach English" is as unrealistic as to assume that "anyone can teach French." As one person expressed it, in many schools the basic problem is one of weak teachers rather than of a weak program, and this problem is aggravated by having on the faculty people who are "teaching English out of economic necessity" and who may not have had the training to present their subject effectively.

In the matter of professional training, teachers seriously questioned the value of the education courses required for certification:

The "education courses" one takes in preparation for teaching are undoubtedly the greatest waste of time and energy one encounters in preparation for teaching. Because of these "requirements" many courses which would be of value must be omitted from the undergraduate program of study.

Of the 20 hours I earned in education, only eight (student teaching) were worthwhile. I considered four classes in education and psychology a complete waste of my time. I gained valuable experience through student teaching because I was "guided" but not told what to do all the time.

Education courses...are vague--theoretical. Most of the material is far removed from the unideal situation. The new teacher goes into a previously organized school system. She has to adjust to their ideas on many things from discipline to semester grading. The English Department has its own syllabus (usually), its own aims, its group of experienced teachers. Usually there is little room for theory! Education courses are usually a waste of time. When was the last time most of the professors taught in an "average" high school?

> Method is worthless without subject matter. This seems obvious--yet look at the preparatory curriculum. And faculty meetings, institutes, etc., are filled with programs...on how to teach, but what to teach seems taken for granted. "Just follow the textbook and you'll be all right."
>
> All students preparing to teach English...should be required to take a sound methods course in teaching English. New and creative methods are needed to refresh the English teacher's approach.

Those who commented on their college English courses felt that, generally, their preparation in literature had been adequate, though several suggested that English majors should be required to take courses in classical literature as well as the usual English and American literature. A young teacher wrote:

> My college English courses were valuable and enjoyable. I began to learn to appreciate literature, not just to read it. I want my students to enjoy seeing beneath the surface too. I learned I needed to teach by doing--by reading, studying, thinking.

Most teachers reported that the biggest problem in teaching English was lack of time--time for grading papers, time for student-teacher conferences, time for teaching the wide variety of things they are expected to teach. A teacher from a Type III school described her curriculum. (She taught six classes of ninth graders each day, with 31-40 students in each class. Three of her classes were classified as "slow.")

> Anyone who is a below 3.0 reader gets literature, reading, penmanship, logic, critical reading, commercial letter writing,

> friendly letters, charts, library units, word games, phonics, sentence and paragraph writing, oral and written book reports, magazine and newspaper reading,...spelling bees, and work at the blackboard.

From a teacher who had five twelfth grade classes, all college preparatory, came this report:

> I retired June 4, 1965, at the age of 60, completely exhausted. I may teach again after a year but never under the same set-up. I love the work, love the teenagers, and find both work and students stimulating. However, in our school I was expected to teach 1) the review course work-book (Harcourt Brace); 2) the textbooks, a complete grammar by the same company, and a survey course in English literature, a large anthology; 3) to keep a home room of seniors; and 4) to act as a senior class sponsor.... Since I had college-bound seniors, we did in addition to our other writing, an autobiography during the first semester and a research paper during the second semester. I also assigned at least four other novels or plays to my classes. They read outside class, and we took one day each week to discuss the author's philosophy, or his satire, or the use of symbolism, etc. I encouraged the students to choose one of these areas for their long term papers. Many did.

Several people mentioned the need for a thoughtful reevaluation of the teaching of English and of the standards which are generally accepted as desirable by most schools. They suggested that though much has been done in recent years to encourage academically gifted students through honors classes and other accelerated programs, the slow learners--and especially those from a minority culture, such as the Negro--have not been able to benefit from programs designed for their needs. This holds true even for the average student, in some cases, as illustrated by these comments:

> It seems to me that the entire approach to the teaching of English is rather unrealistic as it affects the average student. For the college-bound student and for the student who comes from a home where good English is spoken, the English program (as it now exists) is probably successful. However, in our community of 10,000 there are too many students who do not find their English meaningful and applicable to their life experience. In preparing college students to teach English, I feel an awareness of this condition is rather vital.

> It is my personal opinion that all students should not be required to take four full years of English. Requiring four years of the subject for <u>everyone</u> is too idealistic for many students, I believe, because they cannot cope with the required curriculum. College-bound students, however, must have the four years now required of <u>all</u> students in Chicago.

> The average student is being forgotten. The good "C" student

might just as well be an "F." Colleges don't want him...teachers and parents consider him nice but not very useful. He needs help. Prepare teachers to help him.

In spite of the fact that many teachers have to cope with heavy class loads, multiplicity of activities, and less-than-ideal conditions, a number of those completing the questionnaire seemed to feel that teaching English was a satisfying and rewarding job. This discussion of her work from a fairly new teacher in a Type II school exemplifies this attitude:

> I do not feel that my problems are any different from other English teachers' problems. I am fortunate to be in a progressive system. We have an honors English program, a budget for supplementary materials, and a sympathetic administration. As a department, we are working with the junior high language arts teacher trying to better correlate our programs. Our classes are ability grouped--three levels--with an honors class as a fourth level. We are doing studies in programmed learning and structural grammar and have received funds for new materials.
>
> During the '65-'66 year I will teach four English classes and the literature section of a humanities class. (Modified team-teaching, with social studies, music, and art.) The four of us have put a syllabus together and are quite excited about the prospect.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study would seem to indicate that in the preparation of prospective secondary school English teachers there is a need for more courses in grammar, the English language, and writing geared to high school teaching. Further, there is a need for a methods course concerned with teaching English, as opposed to the general methods courses now offered by most colleges.

V. SUMMARY

Teachers answering this questionnaire reported that heavy class loads and multiplicity of activities were the principal detriments to effective teaching. The majority taught five classes of English daily, with classes averaging from 25 to 30 students. In addition, approximately half taught another subject also, usually speech or a foreign language. Many participated in extra-curricular activities, such as working with students on school publications and dramatic productions or serving as class or club sponsors.

They answered questions concerning the teaching of grammar, composition, and literature, and noted areas in which their curricula were weak. In discussing grammar, more than half the respondents agreed that a new approach to the study of English might be more effective than the traditional one. Those who commented on teacher preparation in this area

felt that too often the study of grammar, linguistics, and language history had been neglected in favor of literature. Similarly, teachers commented that they had been ill-prepared to teach composition, and suggested that more courses in composition and in teaching writing should be available to prospective English teachers. (When asked to evaluate their school curricula, the majority checked writing as the area most in need of greater emphasis, followed closely by vocabulary and spelling.) Nearly all who commented on their college training said that their preparation in literature had been adequate; not surprisingly, many considered literature their most successful teaching area.

Information concerning teacher preparation revealed that approximately half the group held M.A. degrees; all were college graduates. Not all were English majors, however. Slightly more than a third held degrees in other fields, ranging from administration and guidance to mathematics and music. Though most felt well-prepared to teach literature, many were weak in grammar, language history, and writing. They reported that often courses in these areas were either not available in their colleges or did not contain material applicable to high school classes. More than one person felt that too many college courses were geared to the "intellectual" student who was interested primarily in working for advanced degrees; thus, the students who plan to teach may have English <u>hours</u> to their credit, but may not have the background necessary for effective high school teaching.